

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Study

The rise of right-wing groups occurred in the last 20 years in Europe which have seen an increase in right-wing extremism. The cause of the spike was due to political discontent and the loss of right-wing group trust in the government (Tepfenhart, 2011). Research by Rydgren J (2007) also reveals that right-wing groups have been reviving for two decades as an electoral force in Europe. Right-wing groups are part of the political spectrum, which is an ideology to classify the political position of a group using geometric lines. In the world of politics, someone does not have the same view on issues that occur in a country. In various countries, the political ideology spectrum varies according to the beliefs and conditions of the country. The right wing group views that the government must have a more minimal role in society and the people must be able to guarantee their lives individually.

One of the characteristics of the right wing groups is by fighting for something more absolute, such as homeland to God, they also fight for people but on the basis of nationality. Basically, European society likes various kinds of ideas to be used as experiments in facing the challenges of the times. This extreme thinking can be well accepted in society if it has arguments related to the traditions adopted even if it causes radical movements. One of the novels released in 1985 took inspiration from political events that were relevant at the time. This condition reflects the increasing strength of the Christian right, due to the tendency of the United States to accept conservatism in elections. The rise of this right-wing group was supported by politicians and intellectuals who were moving towards capitalism. One critic named Margaret Atwood understands the phenomenon that occurs in society where the nationalist right and the religious right are made into a literary work as an illustration for readers to be more concerned about the phenomena in their environment.

Margaret Atwood is a poet, literary critic, originally from Canada. Since childhood Atwood liked to read literary books, when she was a teenager she had written many poems, comics, short stories, and literary stuff. Atwood's fiction tends to use a critical approach because the literature produced includes categories: identity politics, post-colonialism, gender, environment, and feminism (Gounelas, 2008). Her work is strikingly influenced by feminist views in her community, including: "The History of

Slave”, “The Handmaid's Tale”, Edible Woman”, and “Blind Killer ”. Therefore, Margaret Atwood wrote one of the literary works entitled “*The Handmaid's Tale*” with the dystopian genre, which was inspired by the socio-political situation in America where the writer's concern about the rise of right-wing groups. Atwood is worried about the thinking of fundamentalist Christian groups that take away women's reproductive rights. The author of this novel does not expect oppression against women who do not have rights because it has been regulated by the authorities. The extreme right wing makes politics and the Bible to implement ideological conservatism only for reasons of unfair interests for the people of Gilead, especially women (Neuman, 2006).

Novel *The Handmaid's Tale* is one of the works produced by Margaret Atwood. This dystopian novel is set in the United States, a country that adopts a totalitarian system to describe the future for the rise of the right group called the Republic of Gilead. This novel focuses on the rise of right-wing groups, which results in the loss of women's rights in something that supports life. The implication of the rise of the right has led to the oppression carried out by the rulers of Gilead, namely rich men who use political and religious views to make rules about women being prohibited from doing anything, except cooking, shopping, childbearing (Puglia & Bonez, 2019). In the novel, the oppression carried out by the authorities, in the form of physical and verbal, if they rebelled, they would be shot and pressured to stay at home. The researcher chooses the title “The Rise of Right-Wing and Its Implications for Women's Rights in Gilead” of course related to the contents of novel *The Handmaid's Tale*.

The outline of the novel tells the story of Handmaids in the Republic of Gilead who become sex slaves of commanders to produce offspring. Since at that time the birth rate was decreasing, the Christian right took advantage of this condition to come up with the idea that women should return home to their nature. At the Red Center, women are trained to become Handmaids, they learn about the rules of what to do and what not to do. There are several calls to group people with different castes. Martha is the name for a woman who is in charge of cooking and managing the kitchen, the clothes are green, Aunt is in charge of training the Handmaids and wearing brown clothes, Eyes as a spy agent in case of a revolt, the Guardian is specially assigned to help the Commander. Meanwhile, Handmaid was given the task of carrying a child from the Commander, the Handmaid's clothes were red and used a white head covering. Econowives calls women who belong to poor men, their clothes are colorful, they have to do everything if they can. The highest social level for women is the commander's wife, the color of the clothes

she is wearing is blue, her job is to manage the household and direct the orders of the commander.

Offred is one of the Handmaids who tells what happened to the people of Gilead. Offred, is not the real name, but a pseudonym, Of is the symbol of a Handmaid, while Fred is the name of the commander. Each Handmaid has a different last name, depending on who the owner is. Initially, Offred had a husband, named Luck, and a daughter. But they were separated because Offred was captured by the rulers of Gilead, who would make women who had children because they were considered fertile to produce many offspring in the Republic of Gilead. The rulers of Gilead staged a coup by creating a country based on the Christian Bible, prohibited from committing homosexuality, women were prohibited from reading, writing, watching films, talking to foreigners, there were even caste levels in Gilead society. In this novel, Offred always tells the difference between the Gilead regime and its past life, a time full of freedom.

Offred lives in the house of its Commander, whose name is Fred Waterford, married to Serena Joy, who was once an activist for traditional values. Every month when the fertile period, Offred should have intercourse with Commander Fred, not make love, because it does not give each other pleasure. Handmaids are not allowed to beautify themselves to make them look attractive, because what is needed is a body part that can produce children. At that time, Serena Joy told Offred to have sex with Nick, because Offred was not pregnant yet. Serena Joy has arranged it without the knowledge of the others, except Offred and Nick. The Handmaids exchanged information with other women secretly and whenever the opportunity arose. The impact of the rise of right-wing groups in the Republic of Gilead was not only for Handmaid, but the people who lived there were also restrained. Matters about education, information, career, and even entertainment were limited, including the commander's wife who was also supervised by the Eye. Every violation will be dealt with harshly by the authorities of Gilead, the women are gathered in a ceremony to witness the punishment, the Republic of Gilead is a hell for women whose rights of freedom have been taken away by force.

The reasons people are interested in the novel *The Handmaid's Tale* include the challenging story ideas, writing style, and the meaning contained in it. The following are positive responses from readers of *The Handmaid's Tale* taken from the application goodreads.com. Ipeh Alena: "Atwood's writing style packs the story very beautifully". Evan Kanigara: "The idea is interesting. A dystopia that describes how difficult it is to live as a woman in Gilead" There are also stories of memory and love told by Offred

which also include the theme of this novel, even though it is about life in the past. Alexa Ayana: "This story is good as an example of a scenario if the people of a country become drunk on religion".

On the other hand, there are negative responses conveyed by the readers regarding what they feel. It is undeniable that Atwood chose words in her work that were difficult to understand, especially for Indonesian readers. Istiviani: "The vocabulary is quite difficult. The flow is pretty slow". Heb: "One of the things that I think is lacking from this novel is a flat plot and minimal conflict that stands out". Juliattae: "Reading this book is very miserable and full of emotions, imagining Handmaid's life ruled by the Gilead government system". People who have read this novel think that the government system adopted by Gilead is cruelty to women. If you look at the world today, the novel will take the reader into an unimaginable world. This novel became one of the best-selling works, within a year its publication rose to 60%, even before the election in the United States its sales increased, in 2017 it had printed another 150,000 copies.

Novel *The Handmaid's Tale* received 3 awards, including the Governor General's Award in 1985, the Prometheus Award in 1987, and was nominated for the 1986 Nebula Award. The novel *The Handmaid's Tale* was also made into a theater by Pour Ruders, first staged in Copenhagen in 2002, then in 2003 performed by the English National Opera in London. The author, Margaret Atwood, has received awards for her work, including the Governor General's Award, the National Book Critics, and the Booker Prize. Bruze Miller produced the novel *The Handmaid's Tale* into a television series of the same name. The series began to be released on April 26, 2017, with a total of 36 episodes and a duration of 60 minutes per episode. The results of this television series are widely enjoyed by the audience because the plot, setting, characters are very well packaged and exceed the description of the contents of the novel, but do not eliminate the meaning of the novel's story. (Eliana Dockterman, 2017)

The characterization described by the writers is an important element in knowing how the characters think and act. Atwood creates characters who are black and white, no character who is completely sinful or holy. The author describes Offred as the main character who tells details about the life of the Handmaids. Offred's character is calm and careful in acting, she is very attentive and supervises something around her. Meanwhile, Moira's character is brave, rebellious, and humorous. She was Offred's schoolmate in the past, when freedom was still there. Nick's character, depicted as a mysterious figure, has many secrets. When you've read the novel, your thoughts about Commander Fred will

change, he can't be called cruel, but feel lonely, when you invite Offred to play scrabble. Serena Joy, a character who pretends to be strong, tries to be strong, which wife is not sad to see her husband having sex with another woman.

Another element of a literary work that is no less important is the plot. The plot regulates how an event is related to other events. Plot also plays a role in changing the story according to the structure of events in literary works. The storyline of *The Handmaid's Tale* moves back and forth, telling stories of the past and the present. The novel by Atwood describes the comparison of life between before and after the formation of Gilead. In the novel, Offred's flashbacks are revealed too often, as if he had slipped to reveal the story of everyday life in the past. Atwood did not give any sign of the Offred character who returned to explain the comparison between the past life and the formation of Gilead. The storyline changes suddenly which may make the reader have to be careful in understanding the series of events that occurred. Meanwhile, the climax of the novel is when Offred can no longer hold back her sexual desire to make love to Nick, she gives in to the fear, obedience, and loyalty that have become her principles.

The climax of a story is also supported by other elements to develop the uniqueness of a story idea, namely the writing style. Authors of literary works have different language styles in expressing ideas or fantasies in a written literary work. Different writing styles can reflect the character of a writer to influence the uniqueness of the story being made. Atwood's writing style of words and sentences anesthetizes the reader to understand the meaning of the written word series. Although some readers are bored with Atwood's writing style because it is not modern and difficult to understand, other readers think that it is unique. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood uses a first-person perspective, namely Offred's character with an "I" perspective. Offred actually describes an object, or what a person is doing in her vision in great detail. Atwood wrote a story in the form of a monologue and narrative text, seen from the hopes, emotions, and regrets expressed by the character Offred.

Margaret Atwood dared to write a dystopian genre novel that depicts life if the rise of right-wing groups is increasing in the future, it certainly has received criticism from writers. Based on the background that has been described, I chose this literary work to be used as research. With various characters with different personalities based on the pressure, the unusual style of writing by adding an explanation to something amazed me at Atwood. The focus of the problems in this novel makes me think that the rise of the right wing has resulted in the loss of the rights of the people in Gilead, especially

women. I would like to outline my proposal entitled ***“THE RISE OF THE RIGHT-WING AND ITS IMPLICATIONS TO WOMEN'S RIGHT IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S THE HANDMAID'S TALE: A FEMINIST PRESPECTIVE”***

## **1.2 Problem Statements**

The rise of the right-wing group recounted in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* resulted in a totalitarian form of Gilead government. This made the government act cruelly towards its people. The oppression of women's rights in Gilead was taken away because they did not have the power to oppose the ideology they embraced. Based on this statement, appropriate research questions to discuss are:

1. What are indicators of the rise of the right-wing in *The Handmaid's Tale*?
2. How the rise of the right-wing is depicted in the novel?
3. Why did Margaret Atwood address the rise of the right wing?

## **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

From the research question above, the objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To identify the indicators of the rise of the right-wing in *The Handmaid's Tale*.
2. To describe the rise of the right-wing in the novel.
3. To reveal the reason why Margaret Atwood addressed the rise of the right wing.

## **1.4 Advantages of the Study**

This research is expected to have benefits in education. The benefits of this research are as follows:

### **1.4.1 Theoretical**

Theoretically, the results of this study are expected to provide positive benefits, including:

1. This study can add to the wealth of knowledge about the importance of studying literature to find out the history of the rise of Christian right-wing groups.
2. This study illustrates that oppression is not a good thing to apply to society, especially women, but must be eliminated.
3. This study serves as a foothold or reference for further research related to the rise of right-wing groups as material for further study.

### **1.4.2 Practical**

1. For writers

This study can add insight and experience for writers on how to create interesting literary works with different writing styles and express ideas about what is possible in the world.

2. For educators

This study can contribute ideas about the history of the rise of right-wing Christian groups in the world. These insights are to be shared for students so that they are more critical about knowledge that discusses a phenomenon in society.